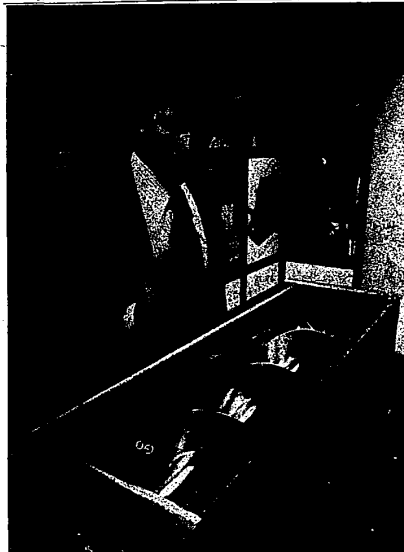


Demonstration blocks with the Webb logo on this pallet handler simulate how this device controls the flow of materials. Marketing manager Bob Richardson appreciates the logic of this machine, as do

corporations like Zenith who roll TVs down the line on this type of conveyor system.



John Anderson uses this open model of a screw conveyor to demonstrate how bulk material is pushed along in a tried and true fashion.

## From Farmington Hills hub

# Webb Co. moves the world's materials

By LYNN ORR

The fifth largest taxpayer in Farmington Hills, topped only by apartment conglomerates and Detroit Edison, is housed in an unpretentious building on Twelve Mile west of Farmington Road, designated by a sign as the world headquarters of the Jervis B. Webb Co.

The sign is a direct contrast to the usually low-profile firm, which runs a discreet one-inch advertisement in the Wall Street Journal and has total annual sales of more than 100 million.

A Detroit firm since 1919, when founder Jervis B. Webb sold his first keystone conveyor chain, the company has climbed into the top echelon of material handling companies in the world. The Webb family has retained private control of the corporation, including five affiliates, seven divisions, subsidiaries, and 13 international licenses.

Jervis C. Webb, president and son of the founder, moved the corporate headquarters to a \$6 million capital investment in Farmington Hills last year. About 450 employees, of a 2,000 person fluctuating work force in the U.S. and Canada, now call a 180,000-square-foot office building home.

A barbershop on the lower floor and outdoor picnic tables with a luxurious view of 15 acres of Webb property are creature comforts for executives, engineers, and the rest of the corporate work force which oversees the international production of material handling devices.

"When you want to move anything from one point to another, that's mate-

rial handling, and the device which you use to move that material from point A to point B is a material handling device," explains John Anderson, public relations representative, who appears accustomed to defining the company's manufacturing operation.

Think of a simple belt conveyor that pushes your groceries past a cashier, and you'll know what a conveyor, as well as a material handling device involves.

The company manufactures every type of material handling device with the exception of a forklift truck.

From a simple belt conveyor to a robot-like mini cart, material handling devices can transport an entire car through a final assembly process or move bulk materials, such as fertilizer.

Material handling sophistication, demonstrated by pallet handlers, control the flow of material as well.

Control is what impressed Henry Ford when he purchased an overhead chain conveyor from Webb in 1921. When the concept proved successful, Ford ordered 30 miles of conveyors for all of his plants in the U.S. and around the world. And it wasn't until the early 1960s that Webb sales in the automotive industry dropped below 50 per cent of the total sales.

THE POST-WAR era marked another change for the company, as well.

"Back in the early 1960s, they had to decide to grow in all directions or one field, and the decision was made to stay in one area and acquire competence there," says Bob Richardson,

marketing manager.

Expansion took the direction of a one-stop shopping concept—creating subsidiaries, divisions, and affiliates to handle the needs of a manufacturing and job-oriented business, such as advertising and electrical sidework.

"We're self-contained," Richardson says. "A lot of corporations are pulling these services in-house."

Webb advertising, for example, is a function of an internal advertising agency that does outside work as well. A staff of photographers, writers and artists compose Webb maintenance manuals, produce motion pictures, and do the company's micro-filming.

That concept is carried over to the manufacturing end of the business, much in keeping with the spider web logo identified with the company.

Affiliates like Webb Forging in Belleville and Control Engineering in the Farmington Hills location bid like other companies on Webb jobs and maintain a 50 per cent margin of outside jobs.

"We at times use competitors, but that doesn't happen too often," Richardson says.

A subsidiary like Webb International oversees 13 licensees, who are licensed to manufacture Webb equipment, which is how the majority of overseas operations are accomplished. Ann Arbor Computer Corp., another subsidiary, could be a vendor of computer interfacing equipment for Webb installed systems.

From simple belt conveyors, the material handling concept has been expanded to include robot-like mini carts, 90 of which were recently

installed at Harper Hospital in Detroit.

The mini cart follows a guide wire imbedded in the floor or underneath the carpeting that emits a low-frequency sound, explains Anderson.

"In a hospital, it's used to pick up dirty linens, deliver them to the laundry, take a shower bath, pick up clean linen and deliver to the floor," Anderson says. The same basic concept is used to transport food trays.

BECAUSE OF the type of equipment the company designs, manufactures, and installs, it's avoided trouble of the 1960s and '70s with federal agencies concerning pollution and other environmental concerns.

"Capital equipment manufacturing means we're not involved with much that flirts with any area that requires government control," Anderson says.

"In terms of noise pollution, we'd have

to be on the bottom in the processing line."

A handful of stockholders and family control and an executive open-door policy allows rapid decision making, which is another plus for the company, Richardson adds. And the work force is basically long-term.

"The corporate sales force averages 25 years with the company," he says; and between 50-60 employees notched 35 years of service last year alone.

But there are some members of the younger generation around, like the president's son, who currently heads the Detroit shop.

His butcher block desk with an ax chopped into one end of its polished surface may indicate a touch of whimsy for the Webb company in the future if the family ownership persists into the 1980s.

Staff  
photos  
by  
Harry  
Mauthe

## Bedtime takes on new flights of fancy with Yves St. Laurent's Grand Papillon gown.

This social butterfly flits from nightdressing to goodnight dressing in a rush of red silk crepe. Taking on new dimensions with a show of shoulders and a hip slung blouson. Trailing satiny ribbons along the way. Sizes P and S, \$130. From his newest sleep and loungewear collection priced \$75 to \$150. In New Reflections at Hudson's Northland only.



**Hudson's the Christmas Store**



This colorful model of the Dog Magic Power and Free concept captures the essence of what Webb's contribution to the material handling industry is all about—if the

system gets shut down in one area, the Dog Magic trolley "stop" allows continued movement on the rest of the line.

## Madonna plans winter sports

The physical education department of Madonna College, Livonia, is shaping up its selection of courses for winter term II, which begins Jan. 9.

Beginners and seasoned skiers will be welcome to join Madonna's ski course, PED 209, scheduled for Fridays at Mt. Brighton, from 1 to 5 p.m. The 10-week course will include one hour of instruction and unlimited tow for three hours of skiing each Friday. The class fee is \$40, not including an equipment rental charge of \$13.

For those preferring the indoors this time of year, Madonna will offer "Team Sports," PED 358. Scheduled for 9 to 10 a.m. Tuesdays and

Thursdays, the course will be divided into mini-sessions for playing volleyball, handball, basketball, touch football, badminton and gymnastics. There will be a \$5 fee in addition to tuition charges.

Introduction to Yoga, PED 171, will also be offered winter term II, on Tuesday nights from 7 to 8:30 p.m. The fee, for tuition-paying students, is \$5. Yoga may also be taken on a non-credit basis for a \$40 fee.

For more information about registration, or to learn about other programs at Madonna College, contact the admissions office at 425-8000, ext. 15.